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SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA, WHA/PPC, WHA/CEN, AND WHA/PD

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SUBJECT: IT'S MY PARTY AND I'LL RUN IF I WANT TO: SMALL  
PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN HONDURAS

1. SUMMARY: Some people say he is as crazy as the patients he attends to, but psychiatrist and Social Democrat Carlos Sosa Coello firmly believes he can win the Honduran presidency for his party, the Partido Innovacion y Unidad (PINU). Sosa and 2 other minor party candidates--Juan Almendares Bonilla of the Partido Unificacion Democratica (UD) and Juan Ramon Martinez of the Partido Democratica Cristiano de Honduras (PDCH)--continue to campaign for the presidency despite Honduras' entrenched dual party presidential politics. In the last presidential election (2001) the two major party candidates--current President Ricardo Maduro of the Partido Nacional (PN) and Rafael Pineda Ponce of the Partido Liberal (PL)--garnered 96.5% of the vote. Sosa, Almendares, and Martinez represent parties who earned 1.5%, 1.1%, and 1% of the vote respectively. END SUMMARY

2. Carlos Sosa Coella (PINU): Sosa, a Catholic and self-described Social Democrat, agrees with his Marxist and atheist father that capitalism is "a perversion of what it is to be human." Sosa was one of the first PINU members to serve in the National Congress; he was first elected in 1990. He sees in Honduras two countries: one poor, marginalized, and struggling to survive, the other conversely corrupt and opulent. His PINU party currently holds only 4 of the National Congress' 128 seats, but Sosa speaks proudly of his party's opposition activities in the legislatures (often conducted in cooperation with the UD). He criticizes the vague campaign promises of his rivals from the traditional Liberal and National parties and presents what he describes as more concrete, specific proposals for Honduras' future. The traditional parties, he claims, offer only "more of the same" and continue to win only because the desperate need of most Hondurans prevents them from considering the long-term future benefits of PINU's political platform. Sosa has long been active in the field of counter-narcotics (from 1994-1998, he served as Chair of the Congressional narcotics commission and Vice President of the National Council Against Narcotrafficking), served as Honduran Ambassador to Venezuela starting in 1999, and has a reputation for energy, intellect, and integrity.

3. Juan Almendares Bonilla (PUD): A doctor, ex-rector of the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Honduras (UNAH), and director of the Center for Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture, Almendares cites "a profound love for the cause of transformation and for the fight to change the situation of the poor" as his motivation to run for president. He consistently condemns Honduras' internal human rights situation as one of the most violent and corrupt countries in Latin America and the world and hopes that PUD can pull out a "surprise" victory to start to combat those problems. Almendares is the most left-leaning of the three minor party candidates--the only one to offer unqualified support for Honduran relations with both Cuba and China (see chart below for summary of selected positions).

4. Juan Ramon Martinez (PDCH): Martinez, 63, is a founder of the PDCH. Based on past elections, the PDCH can expect to garner the fewest votes of any party (only 1% in the 2001 presidential election). However, Martinez is part of an interesting new trend in Honduran politics--journalists seeking elected office. Martinez and the UD candidate, Almendarez, have both been columnists for many years. 21 journalists ran in the primary elections in February, marking a new phenomenon for Honduran politics.

5. CHART: Comparison of PINU, UD, and PDCH candidate positions on selected issues

	Sosa (PINU)	Almendares (UD)	Martinez (PDCH)
CAFTA	need more info	opposed	in favor
Sending troops to Iraq	opposed	opposed	opposed
Relations w/ Cuba	in favor	in favor	in favor

Death penalty	opposed	opposed	opposed
Reforms to decrease autonomy of UNAH	opposed	opposed	in favor

Palmer